

Hans Slechta '20

Linguistics

Proto-Slavic Grammatical Case Morphology

Abstract

Hans Slechta

Many of the Slavic languages in the modern world have up to six grammatical cases which denote the function of a given noun in a sentence. These cases can be traced back to the Proto-Slavic language, the ancestor of all the modern Slavic languages. In this project, I will research the morphology of the case systems in the Slavic languages, and I will proceed to use this research to form a hypothesis for a reconstruction of the morphology of the Proto-Slavic case system. I will compare my hypothesis to existing theories for the Proto-Slavic case system, and I will argue for the accuracy of my hypothesis in cases where they differ.

Biographical Sketch

Hans Slechta

I am a junior linguistics major in the College of Arts & Sciences at Cornell. I was born and raised in Lancaster, PA, attending Manheim Township School District for K-12. At Manheim Township High School, I participated in many music ensembles and spent a few years on the Quiz Bowl team. My senior year of high school, I was the president of the Percussion Ensemble, president of the Performing Arts club, drum major of the Marching Band, treasurer of the Chorus, and played Oliver Warbucks in the spring musical, Annie. I was in National Honor Society and graduated in the top 10% of my class of more than 400, with a GPA over 100 on a weighted 100-point scale.

I entered Cornell in fall of 2016, listing an intended physics major. After taking a couple linguistics classes, I decided to become a linguistics major instead, and I applied to the major in summer 2018, between sophomore and junior years. On campus, I am involved with the Glee Club and the Chamber Singers, as well as being the current Lay Leader/President of the Protestant Cooperative Ministry. I am a Cornell Chimesmaster, and I also worked as a summer research assistant for Professor Sam Tilsen over summer 2018 and into fall 2018.

Statement of Purpose

Hans Slechta

In my project, I will be studying the grammatical case morphology of Proto-Slavic through the grammatical case morphology of the modern Slavic languages. I plan to use the Comparative Method, a tool of Historical Linguistics, to attempt to reconstruct the grammatical case morphology of Proto-Slavic, independently of the prior research done on Proto-Slavic. I plan to look at the case morphology of Slavic languages in all three of the major sub-families: Southern, Eastern, and Western. Using the existing models from the modern Slavic languages, I will work on a reconstruction of Proto-Slavic case morphology which has eventually changed into the case morphology that we see in the modern Slavic languages. I will then, within a research paper, compare my reconstruction with the currently accepted reconstruction of Proto-Slavic, and I will argue the strengths of my reconstruction where it differs from the current model. If the current model perfectly matches my reconstruction, then I will just provide my methods and reasoning for my decisions in the reconstruction.

In the field of Historical Linguistics, there is a need for constant review of current theories, based on the facts that new discoveries could reveal new information about the old languages and that there is no way to definitively prove a hypothesis about a language which is no longer spoken. For those reasons, further studies of proto-languages are always important to the field of Historical Linguistics. I am also interested in pursuing this topic as a starting point into the study of Proto-Slavic. I am interested in the similarities and differences in modern Slavic languages, and I'm interested in studying Proto-Slavic to see if I can determine where some of these differences originated. There are also some interesting features of Slavic languages which are currently unexplained or unsatisfactorily explained, and I would like to dive into those

questions at some point in the future. I hope to use this project as a solid introduction for my own personal study of Slavic languages and the Proto-Slavic reconstructed language.

I will carry out this research here in Ithaca, at Cornell. The resources I need are primarily books and journal articles that I can find through Cornell's library. These resources include some books that focus on Slavic languages or Slavic linguistics in general, some books that are studies of specific daughter languages of Proto-Slavic, some books that focus on individual grammatical cases in one or many Slavic languages, and one book that summarizes the work done on Proto-Slavic inflectional morphology, including grammatical case morphology. I will use this last book, *Proto-Slavic Inflectional Morphology: A Comparative Handbook*, by Thomas Olander, as the primary source for the current theory on Proto-Slavic morphology. If needed, I will also locate and add grammars or dictionaries of certain Slavic languages to my existing bibliography, if I discover that I need additional information about a specific phenomenon that I discover while working.

Since I will not be the first person to study Proto-Slavic grammatical case morphology, there are numerous sources describing different theories that have been proposed for how the morphology of the Proto-Slavic case system looked. Since I am hoping to find the parts of these theories that I agree with and provide arguments against the parts of these theories that I don't agree with, I will be trying not to let the current theories of Proto-Slavic influence my initial reconstruction. I will, however, consult the Olander source to match up my theory against the currently accepted theory, after finishing my initial reconstruction. While Olander will be my major source for the currently accepted theory, I will also be looking at older sources that have other linguists' reconstructions of certain aspects of Proto-Slavic's case system. It's possible that one of the older sources would match my reconstruction better than the modern sources, leading

to an instance where I would heavily rely on the older source in my comparison. I would argue for my reconstruction, taking into account the original reasons for why the older reconstruction had been abandoned for the modern view.

As nothing can be definitively proven in historical linguistics without the discovery of previously unknown ancient texts, I hope to provide an additional voice of support to the parts of the current reconstruction which agree with my reconstruction, and I hope to add a voice to the conversation about parts of the reconstruction which disagree with my reconstruction. The field is constantly reanalyzing the current models of proto-languages which we have little to no written evidence of, and I hope to insert my research into this part of the field, reevaluating how accurately the current model of Proto-Slavic reconstruction reflects the language that the early Slavs would have spoken. We might not be able to fully ascertain the intricacies of the language they spoke, but with more voices and more opinions being introduced to the field of historical linguistics, we can reconstruct a pretty close facsimile of how the Proto-Slavs would have spoken.

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